

ADVENTURES
IN WESTERN NEW YORK HISTORY



Erie County
and the
Civil War

by Richard C. Brown



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Private and First Sergeant in Union uniform with New York Volunteer Regiment, Regiments' People's Illustrated Regiment, 1861-1864. Illustration courtesy of the Company of Military Artists & Historians.

Erie County and The Civil War

by Richard C. Brown

How did the Union fight—and win—the Civil War? Experts agree that it took a plentiful supply of the Four M's: Men, Money, Material, and Morale. Erie County, New York, played a part in the victory by contributing its share of the 4 M's to the Union cause.

The Census of 1860 showed Erie County to have a population of 141,971. Three-fifths of these people lived in the rapidly growing city of Buffalo, where 81,129 persons resided. Amherst had the largest population of any town in Erie County, 5,084. It was one of only three towns that exceeded three thousand in population, the other two being Clarence and Newstead.

Traveling by railroad on his way to his inauguration in Washington, newly-elected President Abraham Lincoln arrived in Buffalo on the afternoon of Saturday, February 16, 1861. After an enthusiastic reception at the railroad station, he and his family were taken to the American Hotel. There they remained overnight.

On Saturday afternoon, President-elect Lincoln made a brief and cautious speech to a crowd assembled on the street underneath a balcony of the American Hotel. In the evening he and Mrs. Lincoln greeted hundreds of men and women at receptions held in their honor. The next day they went to church with ex-President Millard Fillmore, Erie County's most distinguished resident. Sunday night the Lincolns continued on their journey.

Only a little more than a month after the new President was inaugurated, Confederate guns fired on Fort Sumter. Lincoln then called for volunteers to put down the rebellion. After that, four more states joined the original seven in the Confederacy, and the war came.



President-elect Lincoln addressing a crowd from the balcony of Buffalo's American Hotel. Former President Millard Fillmore looks on. Reproduced from a mural by Charles Greil, E. Riegel, and Angelo Scibetta, in the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society.

The First M

As might be expected, news of the firing on Fort Sumter and of Lincoln's call for volunteers caused considerable excitement. Towns in Erie County at first generally neglected to take separate action in organizing volunteers. So their patriotic young men began hurrying toward Buffalo to join city comrades in enrolling themselves as soldiers of the Union. By the middle of May the first Erie County regiment—the 21st New York Volunteer Infantry—was on its way to war under the command of Colonel William F. Rogers.

In July, Major Daniel D. Bidwell of Buffalo began recruiting another regiment, chiefly in Erie and Chautauqua Counties. Designated as the 49th New York Infantry, it left Buffalo in September 1861. The 49th saw little heavy fighting until 1864 but then it saw more than enough at Brandy Station, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and Cold Harbor as the Army of the Potomac slugged its way toward Richmond. Shortly after this campaign, Daniel Bidwell, by then a Colonel, was killed at the battle of Cedar Creek.

Still another Erie County regiment began its career in September 1861, though it failed to reach full strength until the following February. Then it became the 100th New York Infantry. Colonel James Malcolm Brown, a Scotsman by birth, was the first commander of the 100th. Nearly all its original 902 officers and men were from Erie County. Probably the majority of these were from Buffalo, but every town in Erie County had representatives in the regiment.

Some Erie County towns contributed whole companies to the 100th New York Infantry. Captain Daniel D. Nash of Springville recruited the

87 men of his Company A in the Town of Concord. Captain Lewis S. Payne, commander of Company D, was from Tonawanda. The 90 men in his company were from Tonawanda and Grand Island. No doubt some of them signed up at the recruitment center located in the tavern of Mr. Birdwhistle. It stood near the present site of Kenmore West High School.

Smaller units, as well as regiments, were formed in Erie County during the first year of the war. Among these was Battery I of the 1st New York Artillery. It won fame as “Wiedrich’s Battery,” from the name of its first commander, Captain Michael Wiedrich. A sword given him by his fellow officers is displayed in the “Military Heritage” section of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

The 44th New York Infantry, commonly known as the Ellsworth Regiment, was raised in various parts of the state during the summer of 1861. Its first officers were Captain Edward P. Chapin, First Lieutenant George M. Love, and Second Lieutenant Benjamin K. Kimberly.

Later Captain Chapin was promoted to Major. Still later he became commander of the 116th New York Infantry with the rank of Colonel. The 116th served in the campaign that wrested control of the lower Mississippi Valley from the hands of the Confederates. Colonel Chapin was killed on May 27, 1863, during an attack on fortifications near Port Hudson, Louisiana.

Originally the 116th New York Infantry, as shown by its published muster roll, contained men from all over Erie County:

Company A—Captain Ira Ayer. 98 officers and men enrolled in Evans, Eden, Brant, Hamburg, East Hamburg, and a few in Buffalo and Aurora.

Company B—Captain Albert J. Barnard. 101 officers and men, enrolled in Clarence, Newstead, Lancaster, Alden, Cheektowaga, Elma, and Aurora.

Company C—Captain David W. Tuttle. 90 officers and men, enrolled principally in Buffalo, with a few in Cheektowaga, Alden, Eden, and Sardinia.

Company D—Captain John Higgins. 100 officers and men enrolled mostly in Buffalo, with some from Newstead, West Seneca, Aurora, and Colden.

Company E—Captain Richard C. Kinney. 90 officers and men, enrolled principally in Buffalo, with a few in Amherst.

Company F—Captain George G. Stanbro. 84 officers and men, enrolled in Concord, Sardinia, Boston, and Collins.

Company G—Captain John M. Sizer. 90 officers and men, enrolled in Buffalo.

Company H—Captain William Wuerz. 89 officers and men; 57 of these enrolled in Buffalo, the rest in Aurora, Amherst, Clarence, Brant, Hamburg, and West Seneca.

Company I—Captain Jefferson Stover. 90 officers and men; 22 of these enrolled in Marilla, the rest in Buffalo, Wales, Holland, Lancaster, Sardinia, and Elma.

Company K—Captain James Ayer. 84 officers and men, enrolled principally in Evans with some from Hamburg, Brant, and North Collins.

Soldiers, sailors, and marines from Erie County fought in nearly every engagement of the Civil War. Accounts of some of their adventures are included in manuscripts or printed works held by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Other original accounts of Civil War service, such as diaries, have been kept by descendants of soldiers, sailors, or marines. Still others are in the files of town historical societies.

Sailors and marines from Erie County enlisted as individuals, rather than in units, so it is more difficult to locate the war theatres of their service. But even for the army units it is hard to say accurately how many men from Erie County served during the Civil War. Men born in Erie County moved away or enlisted in units outside the county of their birth for one reason or other. Moreover, many men who enlisted in Erie County came from elsewhere, sometimes from across the border. It is known that thousands of Canadians enlisted in the Union armies, particularly late in the war when large bounties were being paid for enlistments.

Early in the war patriotism alone produced enough volunteers. However, when the 100th New York Infantry was formed in February 1862, the Federal government offered volunteers a bounty of \$100, payable at the end of two years' service. Two years later the federal bounty for new recruits had increased to \$300, with an additional \$100 payment to veterans who re-enlisted. State and local governments also

offered bounties. New York State alone spent over \$86,000,000 in payments to volunteers. Erie County paid out more than \$2,000,000 for this purpose. Even so, it was necessary to draft men to fill the ranks during the latter years of the war.

Both sides held expectations of an early victory when the war began. But the fighting turned out to be long, hard, and deadly. Thus, both the Union and the Confederacy had to conscript men for their armies, the Confederacy beginning in 1862 and the Union the following year.

In the North, the first true draft of the Civil War was provided by the Enrollment Act of March 3, 1863. Before this, a draft was threatened if localities did not meet the quotas of soldiers assigned to them. Most areas however, avoided a draft until 1863. Erie County far exceeded its quota of 2,195 assigned in 1862. There were an estimated 3,406 volunteers from Erie County in the field at that time.

It was a different story in 1863 as many areas failed to meet their quotas. Drafts held during the summer of that year produced riots in several northern cities, the bloodiest being in New York City. An estimated 1,000 people were killed there in several days of rioting, and an immense amount of property was destroyed. In fact, a militia regiment from Erie County, the Sixty-fifth, was called to active duty and spent four days in New York City, July 15th to 19th, in helping quell the riots.

attractive bounties were offered to encourage men to enlist in the Union Army

FIFTY DOLLARS EXTRA BOUNTY.

Any person who will present himself to the Ward Committee as a Recruit from the

NINTH WARD

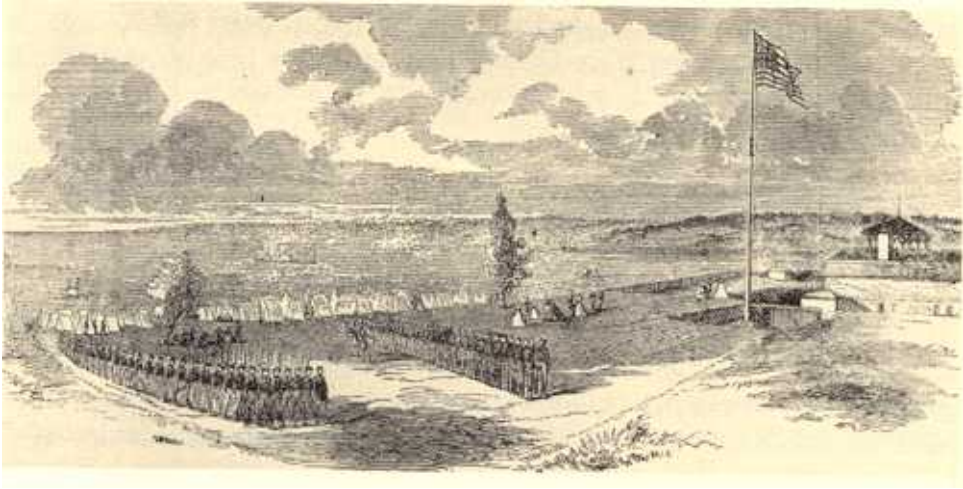
will upon being mustered into any Regiment that he may choose, receive

FIFTY DOLLARS

Extra, over and above the Bounties now being paid by the Government.

Buffalo, August 22, 1862.

WM. G. FARGO,
THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM
Chairman Ward Committee



Fort Porter as the soldiers of 1861 knew it.

No wonder there was apprehension in Buffalo, as the commissioners prepared to hold a draft on August 5, 1863. The draft was held at Fort Porter, located about a mile and a half from the center of the city.

First established in 1844, Fort Porter had become almost deserted until recruiting activities of the Civil War breathed new life into it. Now soldiers stood guard, ready for any trouble, as names were drawn from a "wheel of fortune" in the headquarters building of the Fort.

Buffalo newspapers reported that the draft went forward in a spirit of "friendliness" and "good humor," in contrast to what had happened in New York City. For nine consecutive days the names of men drafted in Buffalo appeared in the newspapers. Then the draft proceedings moved into the towns of Erie County.

How many men were drafted from Erie County? It is difficult to say accurately. The Enrollment Act provided that a drafted man could supply a substitute or could buy one for \$300. While the draft remained a possibility in 1863 and 1864, Buffalo newspapers carried advertisements offering payment to men willing to serve as substitutes for others who were drafted. Certainly some drafted men sent substitutes in their place.

In addition to patriotism, payment of bounties, and the draft, there was one other means by which men were encouraged to serve in the Civil War. Men would be more likely to volunteer, it was thought, if they could



Daniel D. Bidwell, left; Elbridge Gerry Spaulding, center; and Michael Wiedrich, right.

serve with others of their own ethnic descent. For example, two New York regiments, the 155th and the 164th, were mostly comprised of men of Irish birth or parentage. The commander of the 164th, Colonel John E. McMahon, was from Buffalo, and Erie County furnished two companies of men for each of the two “Irish” regiments.

Strenuous efforts were made to raise still another Erie County regiment in the autumn of 1864. Like Wiedrich’s Battery, this regiment was to be composed principally of men of German birth or parentage. At that time, however, only six companies could be raised in Erie, Chautauqua, Niagara, Wyoming, and Cattaraugus Counties. In October, these six companies were mustered into federal service as the 187th New York Infantry. The 187th arrived in Virginia in time to participate in the final campaigns of the war, which resulted in the capture of Petersburg and Richmond.

By the summer of 1865, the authority of the Union government was re-established throughout the land. Erie County had played its part by contributing more than 20,000 men, the first of the four M’s that led to the Union victory. But along the way, Erie County had contributed a total of 4,704 in killed, wounded, and missing.

The Second M

Wars are expensive in more than human lives, and the Civil War was the most costly in America’s history until the time of World War I. To carry on the war from 1861 to 1865, the Union government spent an

average of two million dollars each day. In 1866 the Secretary of the Treasury reported that the Civil War had cost the federal government 6.2 BILLION dollars to that time. By 1910 the cost of the war, including pensions and burial of veterans, had reached 11.5 billions.

The United States financed the war chiefly by loans and by issuing paper money. Loans were obtained by selling bonds and Treasury notes, which paid from 5 to 7.3% interest. After the first few months of the war, the government was in bad financial shape, because people were reluctant to buy bonds and Treasury notes.

Then the task of selling them was turned over to the powerful firm of Jay Cooke and Company. Cooke established selling agencies throughout the Union. He used newspaper advertising lavishly. He made patriotic appeals, urging people to put their savings into government bonds. Using these methods, Cooke sold about 2.5 billion dollars of government bonds, winning for himself the title of "financier of the Civil War."

For the first time in American history, a tax on incomes was applied during the Civil War. In fact, it was a source of federal revenue for ten years, 1863-1872, after which the income tax was allowed to lapse. The total amount received in this decade was \$346,911,760. During the war years (1863-1865), however, the sum collected amounted to only \$55,000,000.

The law provided that all persons had to report their incomes to the United States Assessor's office in their district. These incomes and the names of persons receiving them could then be published in the newspapers, according to the income tax law. Presumably this part of the law was designed to prevent cheating.

As first passed, the law allowed an exemption of \$800 per year. The amount of income between \$800 and \$10,000 was taxed at the rate of 3 per cent. For income between \$10,000 and \$50,000, the rate was 5 per cent. The tax on income over \$50,000 was 7½ per cent. Thirteen persons in Erie County earned \$40,000 or more, during the year 1863, as reported in the Buffalo newspapers.


BUFFALO MORNING EXPRESS---EXTRA.

REPUBLICAN NOMINATIONS

FOR PRESIDENT,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

FOR VICE PRESIDENT,
HANNIBAL HAMLIN

For Presidential Electors at Large: WILLIAM C. BRYANT, JAMES O. PUTNAM, DEWEY BROWN.



FOR GOVERNOR,
EDWIN D. MORGAN

FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,
ROBERT CAMPBELL

FOR CANAL COMMISSIONER,
SAMUEL H. BARNES

FOR STATE PRISON INSPECTOR,
JAMES K. HATES.

FOR REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS,
ELBRIDGE G. SPAULDING

FOR COUNTY JUDGE,
JAMES SHELDON

FOR COUNTY TREASURER,
NORMAN B. MCNEAL

FOR JUSTICE OF THE SESSIONS,
JOSEPH B. DICK.

FOR SUP. OF THE P.O.,
JOHN NICE

FOR CORONER,
ABNER DEWEY.

The G. O. P. Ticket of 1860, including Erie County office seekers.

NAME	INCOME IN 1863
George W. Tiffit	\$157,767.
A. J. Blackmar	76,601.
George Howard	68,715.
Mayor William G. Fargo	68,037.
Charles Ensign	67,128.
Sidney Sheppard	66,128.
F. H. Root	52,900.
Thomas Clark	50,576.
S. S. Jewett	48,900.
H. B. Miller	44,800.
Lawrence Woodruff	41,064.
B. C. Rumsey	40,000.
D. P. Rumsey	40,000.

Elbridge G. Spaulding, member of Congress from Erie County, reported an income of \$14,815 in 1863. As a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, Spaulding played a significant part in financing the Civil War. He was the main sponsor of a bill that allowed the Secretary of the Treasury to issue "Greenbacks." These Greenbacks were nothing more than paper money issued without the customary backing in gold, but nevertheless considered to be "legal tender." That is, the Greenbacks were "printing press money," backed only by the government's promises, but they could be used in any kind of financial transaction within the United States.

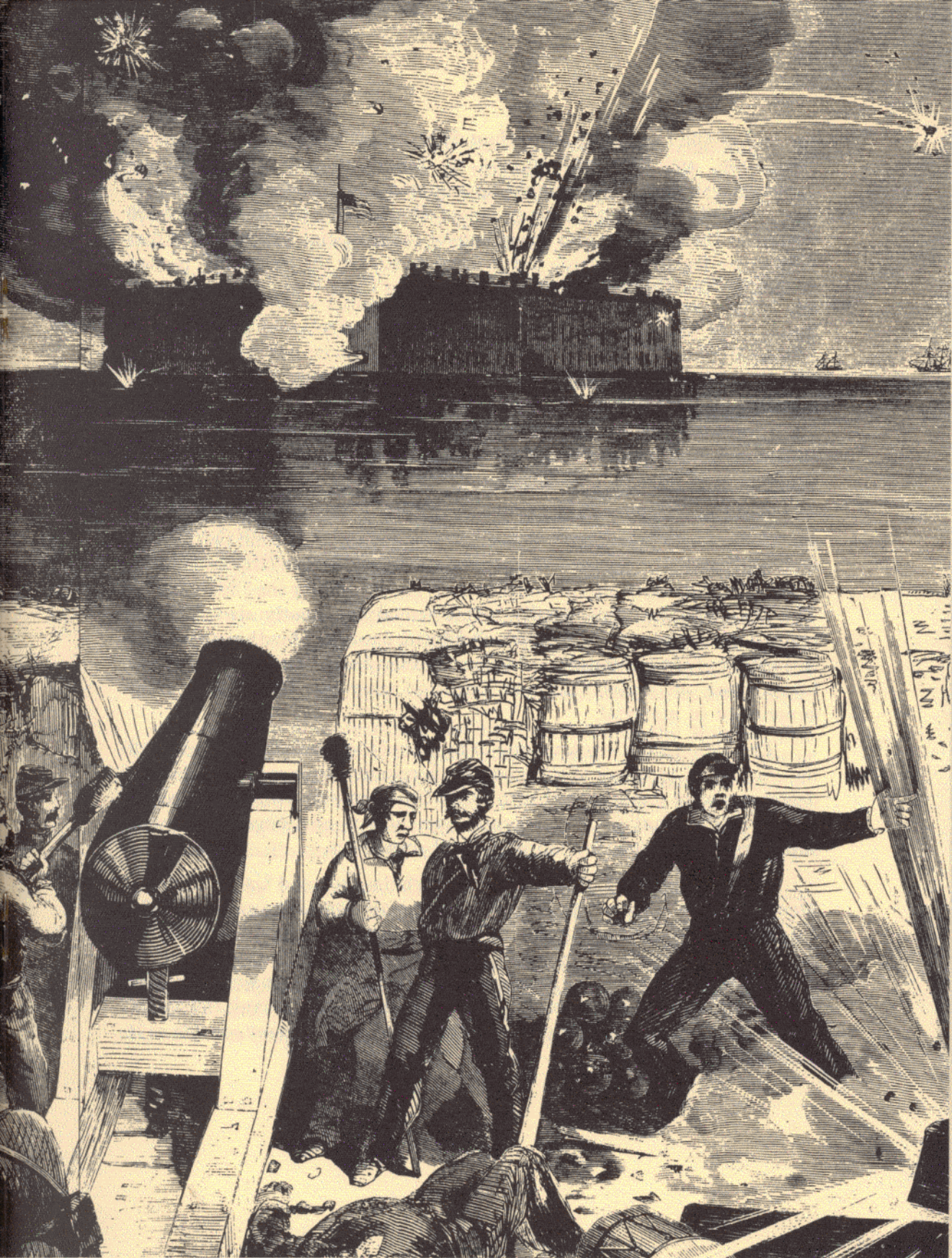
After some changes the bill sponsored by Spaulding authorized \$150,000,000 in Greenbacks. Later bills increased this authorization. At



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THE
BUFFALO
HISTORY
MUSEUM

The firing upon Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, opened the Civil War.



BUFFALO
HISTORY

Shortly afterwards, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers.

the end of the Civil War more than \$400,000,000 in Greenbacks was in circulation, and they had become an important part of the nation's currency system. In 1869, Spaulding prepared and published *A History of The Legal Tender Paper Money Issued During The Great Rebellion*. It described the purposes and the effects of the financial legislation he had drawn up—legislation which did so much to supply the Second M, money needed by the Union government during the Civil War.

The Third M

The Third M, Material, means the equipment, apparatus, and supplies used by an institution or an organization such as the armed forces of a nation. It is hard to think of an item that would *not* be considered material, for the Civil War was the first of the great modern conflicts that involved whole populations.

The Union had superiority in manpower in the Civil War and also great superiority in material. Before the war ended, more than two million men had served in the armed forces of the Union at one time or another while approximately another million men had fought for the Confederacy. The Union armies were usually better armed and nearly always better clothed, better housed, better fed, and better equipped in other ways than the armies of the Confederacy. Millions of men and women worked on the home front, in factory and on farm, to give the Union this great superiority in material.

The Union navy was far superior to that of the Confederates, who had no navy at all to speak of. Confederate blockade runners and commerce destroyers were sometimes able to evade Union vessels. But it was only in March of 1862 that the Confederates were able to challenge directly the superiority of the wooden ships in the Union navy.

Early in 1862 the Confederates remodeled a captured Union ship, the *Merrimack*, by covering its sides and deck with iron. They called her the *Virginia*, giving the old ship a new name as she steamed in Hampton Roads. The Confederate ironclad had the defensive mission of keeping Union ships from entering the James River, which offered a water route to Richmond. It also had the offensive mission of trying to break the Union navy's blockade of Virginia ports by sinking as many enemy vessels as it possibly could.

At first it looked as though the Confederate ironclad might be successful. On March 8, 1862, it rammed and sank one ship, drove another aground, and scattered the other ships of the Union fleet blockading the Virginia coast. The guns of the Union ships could make no impression on the iron protecting the former *Merrimack*.

The next day, however, a Union ironclad arrived at Hampton Roads. Developed by John Ericsson, a Swedish immigrant, it was called the *Monitor*. The *Monitor* had a revolving gun turret that looked like a round metal box perched on an iron raft. The turret itself had cleverly arranged "port stoppers," which were heavy pendulums used to cover the portholes when the *Monitor's* guns were not being fired. The stoppers closed automatically after the guns were fired and withdrawn into the turret, thereby preventing enemy shots from coming through the gun ports.

In their historic encounter, the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack* bombarded each other until all their ammunition was gone. Then the *Merrimack* withdrew to Norfolk for repairs. Shortly before Union forces captured Norfolk, the Confederates sank the *Merrimack* to keep her out of enemy hands.

Although other countries had experimented with ironclad vessels, the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack* fought the first battle between ironclads in the world's history. The *Merrimack* was a remodeled wooden ship. On the other hand, the *Monitor* was built from the beginning as an iron vessel.

Six northern manufacturers had a part in building the *Monitor*. One of these was a Buffalo firm, Niagara Steam Forge, located at the foot of Perry Street, not far from where the Marine Drive Apartments now stand. Niagara Steam Forge made the automatic port stoppers that protected the gunners in the *Monitor's* revolving turret. In this way Erie County made one contribution to Union material.

Before the war ended, Erie County factories, forges, and farms contributed many other items to the Union war effort. Erie County's tanneries produced leather for a horse-and-mule-drawn army. Some small foundries became specialized iron works that turned out castings, nails, agricultural machinery, steam engines and stoves. In the spring of 1862 Pratt and Company were casting iron for ships' boilers. David Bell's shipyard was preparing to build several tugs for the Union navy.

Instead of meat preparation being done in local butcher shops, it was transferred to large processing plants that turned cattle, hogs, and sheep into beef and leather, pork and lard, mutton and tallow. In 1863 the New York Central Railroad opened its huge stockyards on the east side of Buffalo. Drovers on their way to market no longer had to herd their livestock through the streets of the city.

The war years were prosperous times for the Union in general and for Erie County in particular. Still, Erie County prospered not so much by war contracts but rather by increased commerce on the Great Lakes. Between 1861 and 1865, shipyards in the county built far more lake ships and canal boats than naval vessels and river gunboats.

If Erie County had contributed no men, no money, or no material, it still would have been indispensable to the Union victory. The Union's outlet to the Gulf of Mexico by means of the Ohio-Missouri-Mississippi river system was cut off during most of the war. The land route from west to east by way of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was subject to Confederate attack. Therefore, the Great Lakes' inland waterway was the inevitable route along which midwestern grain must move on its way to the east or to Europe. Buffalo, linked by inexpensive canal transportation to the Hudson River and the harbor of New York, was the inevitable transfer point through which the grain must pass.

The grain usually had to be stored for a time in the process of transfer from lake to railroad or canal transportation. This put the owners of grain elevators in an enviable position. Aware of their power, they raised the storage rates from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ and then to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cent per bushel. Shippers grumbled, but there was little they could do except pay the increased rates. The temporary storage of grain had become a necessary stage in the economic and diplomatic struggle that was as much a part of the Civil War as the actual fighting.

In 1862 receipts of wheat in the port of Buffalo reached an all-time high of 30½ million bushels. That fact made Erie County docks, warehouses, grain elevators, and other shipping facilities important allies of the men who fought for the Union. Wheat was a significant item of material in the economic warfare between 1861 and 1865.

Morale—The Fourth M

Wouldn't you think that wartime prosperity would almost guarantee high morale throughout the Union? The truth was different, however. Morale in the North went up and down, like a girl jumping rope or like an active boy on a pogo stick. Usually the ups and downs of morale corresponded to the successes and failures of Union armies in the field.

Morale was high early in the war when Grant captured the Confederate forts, Henry and Donelson. Morale was low after McClellan failed to capture Richmond in the spring and summer of 1862. Morale rose again when Meade thwarted Lee's drive into Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863.

Perhaps the North's morale was lowest in the spring and summer of 1864. At that time General Grant ordered another drive toward Richmond, across the bloody fields of northern Virginia where so many had fought and died before. In only two battles of this campaign, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, the Union army lost 33,000 men in killed, wounded, and missing. This loss amounted to about 1 of every 7 men in the Union forces engaged in this campaign. Nevertheless, Grant resolved to "fight it out along this line" if it took all summer. It took all that summer, that fall, that winter, and the spring of 1865 before Richmond fell.

The 49th New York Infantry, a regiment recruited chiefly in Erie and Chautauqua Counties, fought through that bloody spring of 1864 in Virginia. In three battles between May 5 and June 3—The Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, and Cold Harbor—the 49th had 240 men killed or wounded. This amounted to three-fifths of its total strength at the time. You can imagine the impact such dreadful losses had on the morale of people along the Niagara Frontier.

Keeping up morale on the home front was thought to be women's peculiar duty while men were away at war. In fact, women were supposed to act almost as recruiting agents by unselfishly urging their male relatives and friends to volunteer. As one newspaper writer expressed it:

What can a woman do? Everything! She can give her husband and brother cheerfully to the holy cause of Liberty and Union. It belongs to her to say 'Go.' Let her not say 'Stay.'

Women did much more than send men off to war, however. Accounts of their organized activities between 1861 and 1865 showed that women of Buffalo and the surrounding communities cut and sewed 30,060 shirts for

the soldiers; knitted 9,380 pairs of sox, collected 86,495 hospital supply items; and produced 5,588 pounds of bandages.

Women of Erie County formed the Ladies' General Aid Society early in the war. It became a branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, whose purpose was to provide articles and services which the government did not provide for soldiers. As one of their projects, the ladies of the Sanitary Commission managed the Soldiers' Rest. This was a small frame house located near the Exchange Street railway station in Buffalo. The Soldiers' Rest had 30 beds, a dining room, and a kitchen. Traveling servicemen could find free board and room there.

Interested citizens donated food, bedding, and other necessities to the Soldiers' Rest. For example, a group known as "The Young Ladies of Colden" contributed 26 yards of carpet and \$100. During the war 5,587 servicemen were given lodging and 16,581 meals were served at the Soldiers' Rest by the volunteer workers of the Ladies' General Aid Society.

Women and children of Erie County helped raise money for war purposes by sponsoring and conducting fairs and festivals. More than 18,000 people attended the Great Union Festival held at Moffat's Grove, July 25, 1862. Chicken, ham, pickles, biscuits, fruit, candy, and other donated delicacies covered the picnic tables. Bryant's Minstrels performed at 3:00 in the afternoon, followed by speeches, songs, and dancing in the evening.

Receipts from the Great Union Festival exceeded \$10,000. A few days before Christmas in 1862 a Children's Fair raised an additional \$3,053. On Washington's Birthday, 1864, a Grand Central Fair opened under the direction of the Ladies' Christian Commission, and in nine days \$25,607 was collected. The proceeds from a Strawberry Festival held at Fort Porter on June 30, 1864, amounted to \$1,200.

These wartime fairs and festivals served a double purpose. They raised large sums of money to be used for soldiers' needs and relief for soldiers' families. In addition, the fairs and festivals were designed to lift civilian morale and to dispel gloom caused by bad news from the war fronts.

The Strawberry Festival held at the end of June 1864 came at a time of especially low Union morale. Long casualty lists from the bloody battles of The Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, and Cold Harbor

had stunned the North. In northern Georgia, General William Tecumseh Sherman's Union army was slowly advancing toward Atlanta, but the fighting was hard and costly. Earlier in the spring the Union General Nathaniel Banks, with 40,000 troops and 50 ships, had started up the Red River. His objective was to gain control of Louisiana and East Texas. The expedition was a failure in every respect.

It was at the close of this campaign that Erie County was saddened by the death of Colonel Edward P. Chapin in battle near Port Hudson. To add further to the gloomy news, elusive General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his Confederate horsemen won their greatest victory of the war at Brice's Cross Roads, Mississippi, on June 10, 1864.

Besides bad news from the war fronts there were other reasons to be dissatisfied with the Lincoln administration. The rising cost of living affected everyone in the North, of course, but it weighed most heavily on working men and their families. Even though wages had risen, they had not done so as rapidly as prices, which were estimated to have doubled between the start of the war and the summer of 1864. This situation had caused considerable labor unrest throughout 1863 and 1864. Numerous strikes had taken place in Buffalo, as well as in other northern cities.

Black men were sometimes hired as strikebreakers in Buffalo and elsewhere. This further clouded race relations in the North, even though Lincoln coupled abolition of slavery to preservation of the Union as war aims by issuing his Final Proclamation of Emancipation, effective January 1, 1863.

Northern newspapers expressed some dissatisfaction with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The *Buffalo Courier* branded it as unconstitutional. However, the *Commercial Advertiser*, another Buffalo paper, thought Emancipation was a proper act under the President's war powers as commander-in-chief. A third Buffalo paper, the *Express*, also defended the Emancipation Proclamation, although its editorial page expressed doubt about future relations between whites and freed blacks. The *Express* suggested that perhaps Texas might be set aside as a region in which blacks could be segregated.

If the rest of the Union had followed the pattern of Erie County's voters, Lincoln would not have been re-elected in 1864. Results of the November balloting in Erie County showed Lincoln with 13,061 votes, while his Democratic opponent, General George B. McClellan, had

13,368. Nevertheless, Lincoln won the election with a comfortable margin of about 400,000 popular votes over McClellan's total. The electoral votes were even more in Lincoln's favor, as he won 212 and McClellan only 21.

While the Presidential campaign was going on, residents of the Niagara Frontier experienced perhaps their most exciting—and frightening—days of the war. Although the fighting did not seem to be going well for the Union, Southern leaders realized that only a miracle could save the Confederate States of America. They tried to bring about this miracle by creating diversions along the Canadian-United States border. These diversions, they hoped, would lower northern morale further and possibly cause the war-weary Union to make peace. At the very least, the diversions might take some pressure off the crumbling Confederate armies.

To create these diversions, a band of Confederate secret agents and escaped prisoners of war gathered in Toronto. They planned to release other Confederates confined in Northern camps and thus cause confusion on the Union's home front. There was such a camp at Elmira, New York. Another was located on Johnson's Island, in Sandusky Bay near the Ohio shoreline. A Union gunboat, the *Michigan*, guarded the island prison.

The Confederates in Toronto plotted to seize the *Michigan* and to release the prisoners on Johnson's Island. As there were no other armed vessels on the Great Lakes, the *Michigan* could then shell Buffalo and other lake ports. John Yates Beall, who had served as a Confederate privateer on Chesapeake Bay, volunteered to lead the plot. He had the help of Captain Charles Cole and 20 other raiders. Cole was a former Confederate cavalryman who had escaped for a northern prisoner-of-war camp.

Captain Cole went to Sandusky, posing as a young Philadelphia banker. There he met Captain Carter, commander of the *Michigan*, and made friends with him and his fellow-officers. The Confederate plan was for Cole to entertain the officers of the *Michigan* on board the ship on the night of September 18, 1864. He was to serve them drugged champagne to make them helpless when Beall and his raiders attacked. Beall's raiders were to get to Sandusky Bay by taking over a Canadian passenger ship on Lake Erie.

The plot went wrong. United States Secret Service men learned that the charming "Philadelphia banker" was really Captain Cole of the

Confederate cavalry. They seized him as he made final preparations for the banquet on board the *Michigan*. The gunboat's crew was ready to kill or capture Beall and the other Confederates if they attacked. The raiders reached Sandusky Bay about 11 at night. However, Beall became suspicious when the pre-arranged signal from Cole—the signal to indicate “attack!”—failed to come. So he and his comrades sneaked back to the Canadian shore. They abandoned and burned the ship they had commandeered.

The *Michigan* plot, even though it failed, greatly excited the people of western New York. When news of the plot reached Buffalo, the Board of Trade chartered the tug *Sarah E. Bryant*, hastily armed her with guns from the federal arsenal on Oak Street, and put her on patrol outside Buffalo harbor. The *Sarah E. Bryant* would have been no match for the *Michigan*, but her presence made the citizens of Erie County feel better.

After that, American detectives and Secret Service men went to Toronto to keep an eye on the Confederates there. They soon learned that John Yates Beall had raised enough money to purchase a large lake steamer, the *Georgiana*. The detectives and Secret Service men learned further that Beall hoped to arm the *Georgiana* and raid Buffalo and other lake cities.



The Union gunboat, the Michigan, guarded the Union prison on Johnson's Island.



John Yates Beall headed the plot to seize the Michigan.

By this time the Union government was urging Canadian officials to control the activities of the Confederates in Toronto. The Canadians posted a guard over the *Georgiana*. Even though Beall had purchased arms and naval guns, he could not get them on board. Finally, he decided to strike more directly against western New York.

On December 10, 1864, the provost marshal in Buffalo, G. A. Scroggs, received word that a party of raiders had left Toronto. Law enforcement officers throughout western New York were alerted. Hotels and other public places were watched most closely. In Buffalo, the day police stayed at headquarters at night so as to be ready for any emergencies.

In spite of these precautions, Beall and three other raiders separately slipped across the border. They met in Dunkirk, then took a train into Buffalo. They registered under assumed names at the Genesee House, corner of Main and Genesee, and spent several nights there. During the days, the raiders scouted around Buffalo but found the city so closely guarded there was little opportunity to do damage. So they decided to create confusion by trying to wreck trains coming from the west.

On several December nights, Beall and his comrades attempted to derail trains on the Lake Shore Railroad, about four miles west of Buffalo. None of these attempts was successful, but railroad officials reported them to police and militia officers. When the last try failed on the night of December 15, Beall realized that things were getting too hot. So he ordered his raiders to split up and make their way back to Toronto.

Beall never got back across the border. He and a companion were captured by a Niagara Falls policeman who found them asleep on a bench in the railroad depot. Beall was tried before a court martial at Fort Lafayette, in New York City, on February 1, 1865. The court charged him with violating the laws of war and with acting as a spy. He was convicted and hanged on February 24. Within a few months, fighting had ended on the battlefields.

The *Michigan* plot and Beall's other efforts to spread confusion were the closest Erie County's homefront ever came to experiencing direct enemy action during the Civil War. Erie County's major contacts with the war always came through furnishing the Four M's: Men, Money, Material, and Morale. Some of the men never came home, and their absence was not soon forgotten. For most people, however, in Erie County and elsewhere, the Civil War soon slid into a fifth M—the M of Memory.



The flag flies at half-staff at the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial in traditional ceremonies, conducted by the Chaplain P. G. Cook Camp, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo.

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